DR. STRANGE
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DR. STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
FABULOUS FIRST ISSUE!!
IT LURKS WITHIN THE CRYSTAL BALL!
BRUNNER

THE COSMOS: FOREVER, FORBIDDING, DARK.
MAN BUILDS THINGS TO SHELTER HIMSELF FROM ITS MYSTERIES.
ONE OF THESE THINGS IS HIS REALITY -- THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM OF THE MASSES.
BUT ONE MAN LIVES A DIFFERENT REALITY -- A TRUE REALITY. HE DOES NOT SHRINK FROM THE UNKNOWN.
HE IS, THEREFORE, HIS OWN SHELTER -- AND THE SHELTER FOR ALL HIS FELLOWS.
HE IS STEPHEN STRANGE, A DOCTOR... AND A SORCERER SUPREME.
Through An ORB Darkly
by STEVE ENGLEHART and FRANK BRUNNER
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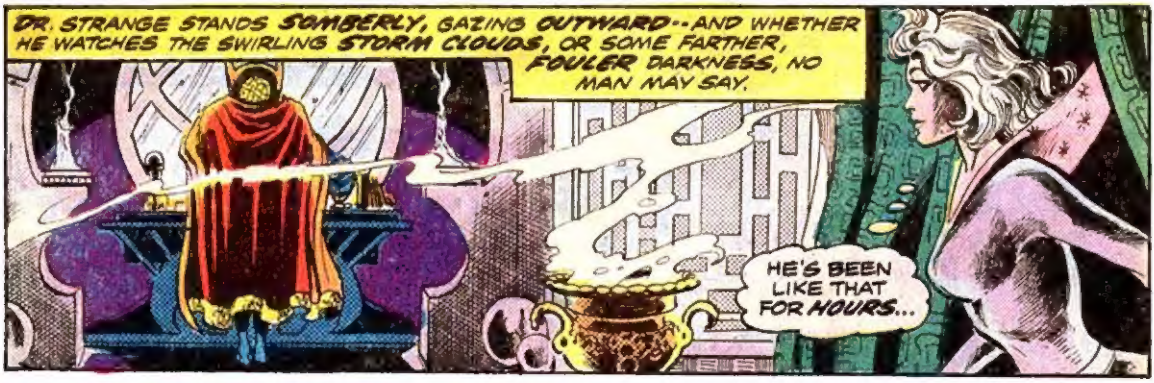
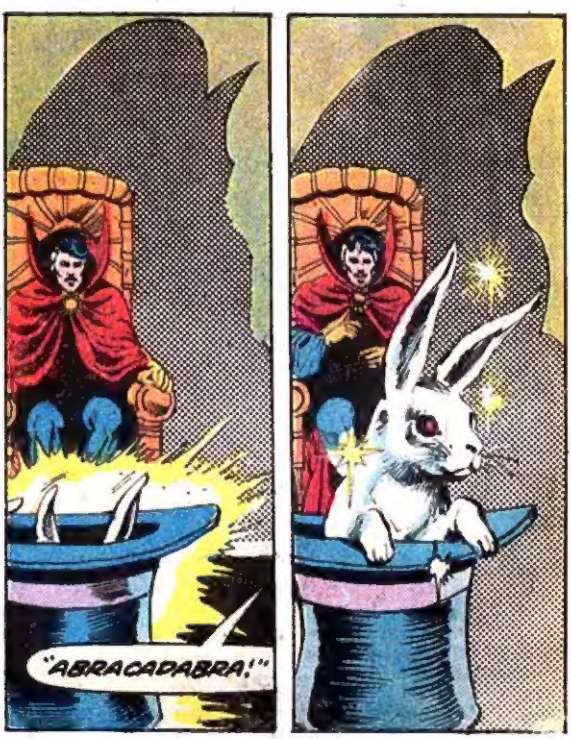

DR. STRANGE STANDS SOMBERLY, GAZING OUTWARD--AND WHETHER HE WATCHES THE SWIRLING STORM CLOUDS, OR SOME FARTHER, FOULER DARKNESS, NO MAN MAY SAY.
HE'S BEEN LIKE THAT FOR HOURS...

THIS SPRITELY WOMAN'S STEP IS SOFT, YET HER PRESENCE FILLS THE CLOUDY CHAMBER. THE MASTER MAGE SENSES HER THERE, AND TURNS...
...FOR SHE IS HIS BELOVED.
CLEA.

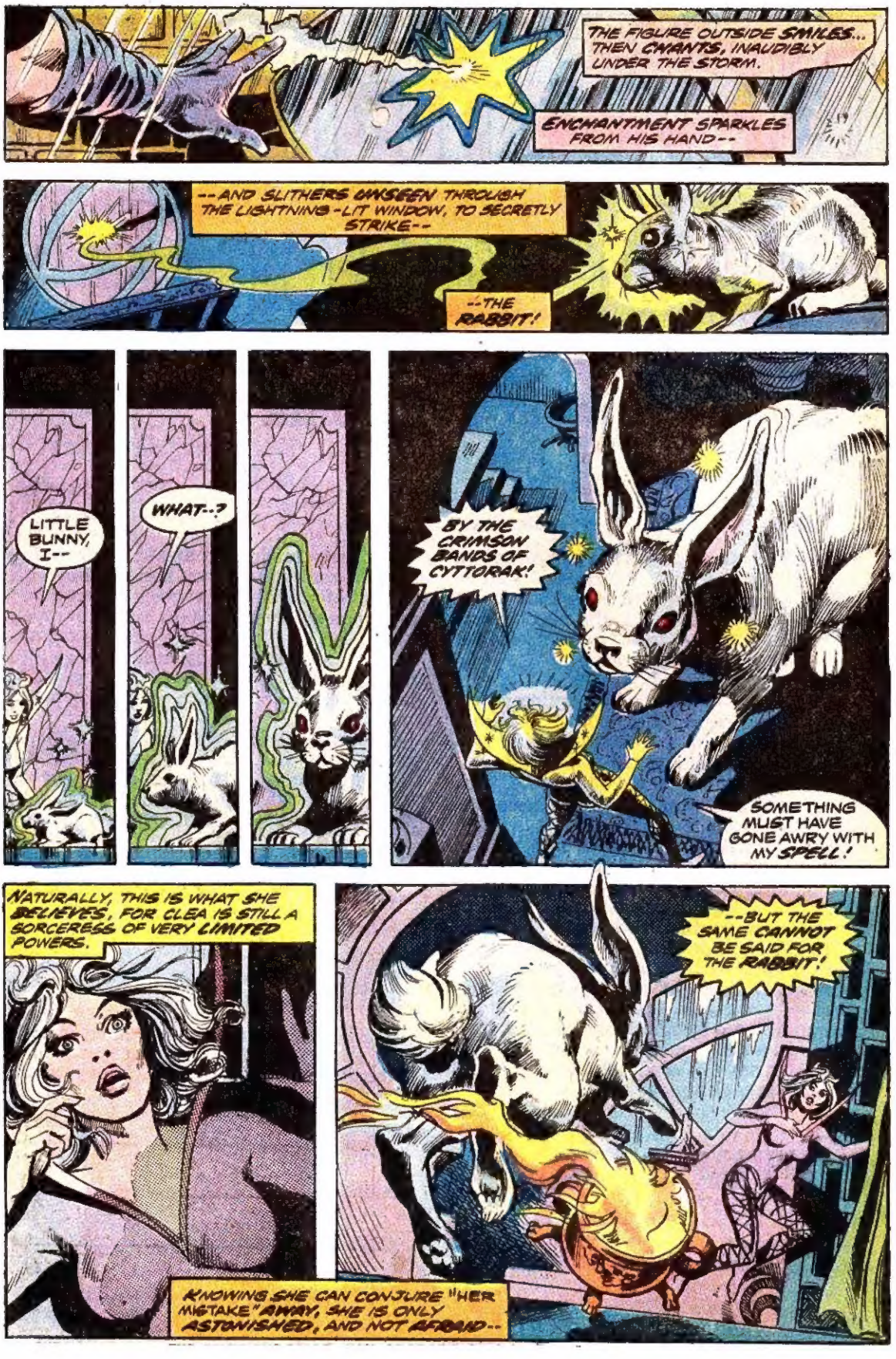
CLEA, I'VE NEGLECTED YOU, BOTH AS A MAN AND AS YOUR MENTOR IN THE MYSTIC ARTS. I'VE BEEN PRE-OCCUPIED...
...AS WELL MIGHT A MAN WHO HAS MET GOD AND WITNESSED CREATION!*
I DO NOT COMPLAIN, STEPHEN. YOUR SOUL DESERVES NO NEW BURDENS.
I COME ONLY TO REPORT UPON MY STUDIES.
*MARVEL PREMIERE #14.--ROY.

IN MY QUEST TO BECOME YOUR DISCIPLE, I'VE LEARNED MANY TERRIBLE SECRETS OF THE OCCULT IN THE PAST WEEKS.
WATCH CLOSELY, NOW--

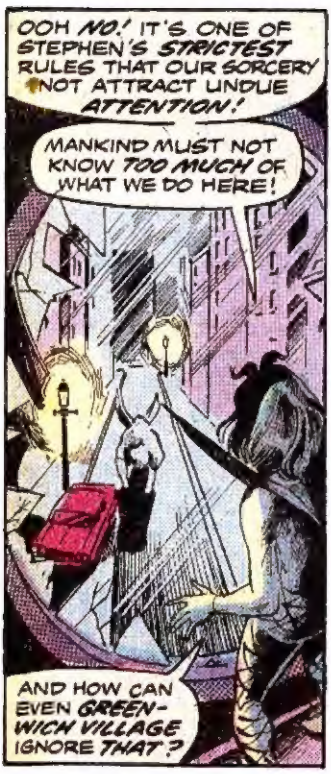
--AS I DEMONSTRATE THE MOST AWESOME OF THE FORBIDDEN RITUALS! I SPEAK THE INCANTATION--


"ABRACADABRA!"

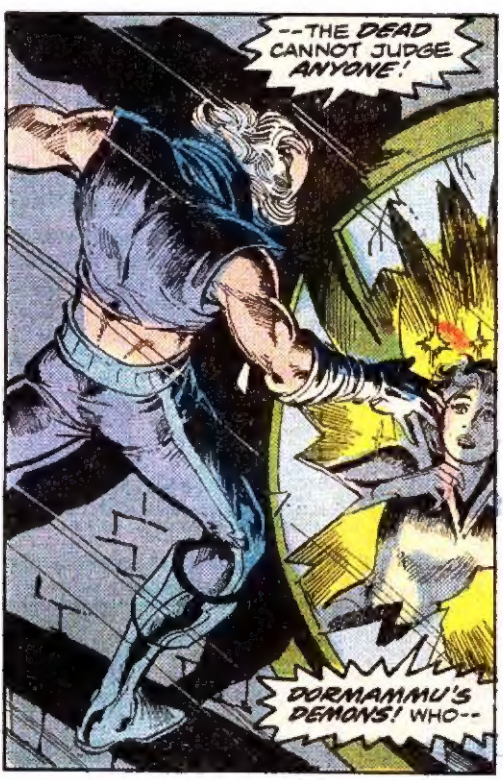
HIS MOOD HAS BEEN HEAVY. EVEN THIS BIT OF BY-PLAY CAN ONLY BRING A SMALL SMILE TO HIS LIPS...
...BUT HIS TENSION MELTS FROM HIM, AS SHE HAD INTENDED.
SO! HAVE I SHOWN YOU WHAT THE VISHANTI DO WITH A DECK OF CARDS?
NO, BUT I'D BE HAPPY TO SEE IT... LATER.
AND WITH THE SOFT, DANCING FLAMES LIGHTING HER SMILE, THERE IS NO DOUBT OF HER MEANING...
LATER--
WONG!
ALMOST AT ONCE, DR. STRANGE'S MAN-SERVANT APPEARS.
WONG, I MUST SLEEP. PREPARE THE MISTS OF MORPHEUS--
--AND THEN CLEAN MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION, IF YOU WILL.
OF COURSE, MASTER. IT SHALL BE AS YOU ASK.
THE TWO MEN THEN STRIDE FROM THE CHAMBER. BEHIND THEM, CLEA SINKS TO THE FLOOR, STILL WARMED BY THE AFTERGLOW OF LOVE.
HE IS SO MUCH A MAN, LITTLE RABBIT... SO MUCH.
HE TIRES, HE HUNGERS, HE MAKES MISTAKES... YET HE HAS CHOSEN TO PROTECT THE REST OF UNSUSPECTING MANKIND FROM EVIL--
--TO STAND ALONE AGAINST THE UNKNOWN DANGERS THAT LURK IN THE KINGDOMS OF MAGIC.
IT IS SUCH A FEARSOME TASK--AND THE SORCEROUS FORCES THAT SEEK OUR SOULS ARE SO CLEVER AND TERRIBLE!
THANK GOODNESS HE HAS THIS SANCTUM, WHERE NOTHING CAN HARM HIM.

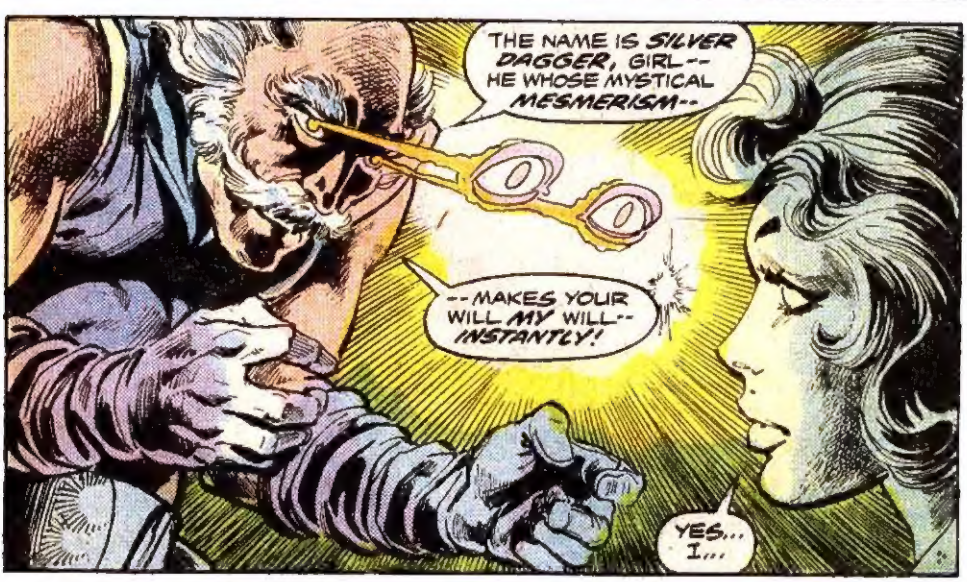

THE FIGURE OUTSIDE SMILES... THEN CHANTS, INAUDIBLY UNDER THE STORM.
ENCHANTMENT SPARKLES FROM HIS HAND--
--AND SLITHERS UNSEEN THROUGH THE LIGHTNING-LIT WINDOW, TO SECRETLY STRIKE--
--THE RABBIT!
LITTLE BUNNY, I--
WHAT--?
BY THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK!
SOMETHING MUST HAVE GONE AWRY WITH MY SPELL!
NATURALLY, THIS IS WHAT SHE BELIEVES, FOR CLEA IS STILL A SORCERESS OF VERY LIMITED POWERS.
--BUT THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR THE RABBIT!
KNOWING SHE CAN CONJURE "HER MISTAKE" AWAY, SHE IS ONLY ASTONISHED, AND NOT AFRAID--

AND HOW CAN CLEA KNOW THAT THE MARE'S TERROR HAS BEEN DIRECTED--
KRASH!
--TO THE WINDOW?!


OOH NO! IT'S ONE OF STEPHEN'S STRICTEST RULES THAT OUR SORCERY NOT ATTRACT UNDUE ATTENTION!
MANKIND MUST NOT KNOW TOO MUCH OF WHAT WE DO HERE!
AND HOW CAN EVEN GREENWICH VILLAGE IGNORE THAT?

NOW I'LL HAVE TO CHASE IT! I HOPE HE WON'T BE TOO DISAPPOINTED IN ME!
NO, MY PRETTY--


--THE DEAD CANNOT JUDGE ANYONE!
DORMAMMU'S DEMONS! WHO--

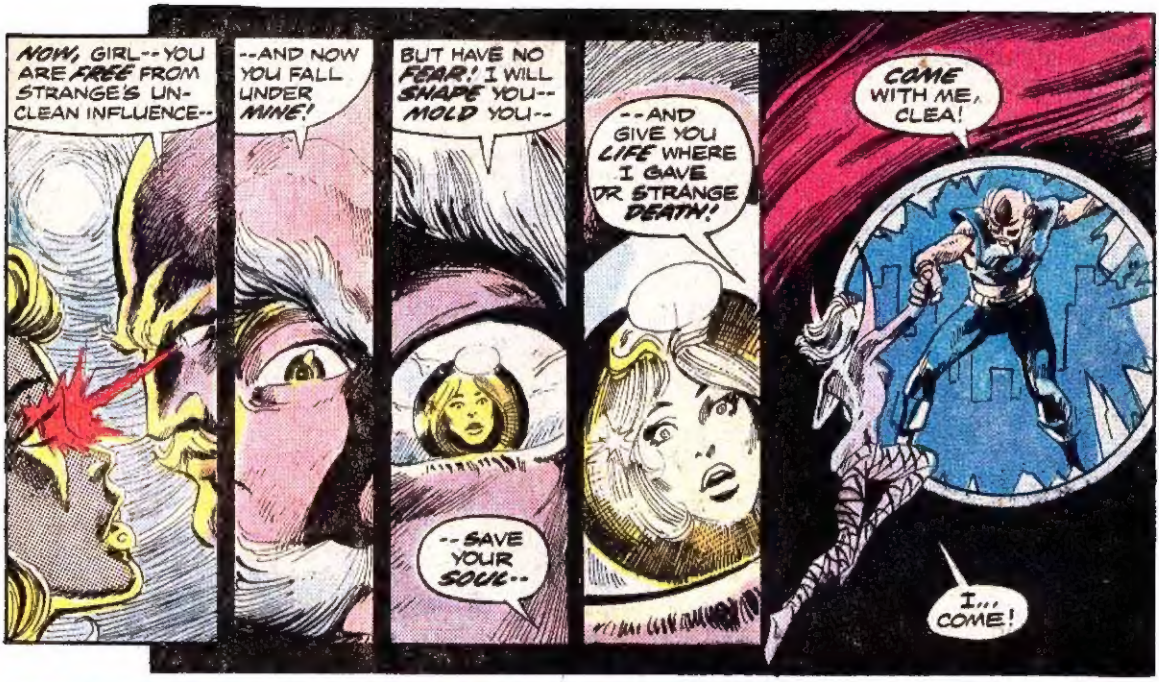

THE NAME IS SILVER DAGGER, GIRL-- HE WHOSE MYSTICAL MESMERISM--
--MAKES YOUR WILL MY WILL-- INSTANTLY!
YES... I...

BUT THE SHATTERING GLASS HAS NOT GONE UNHEARD!

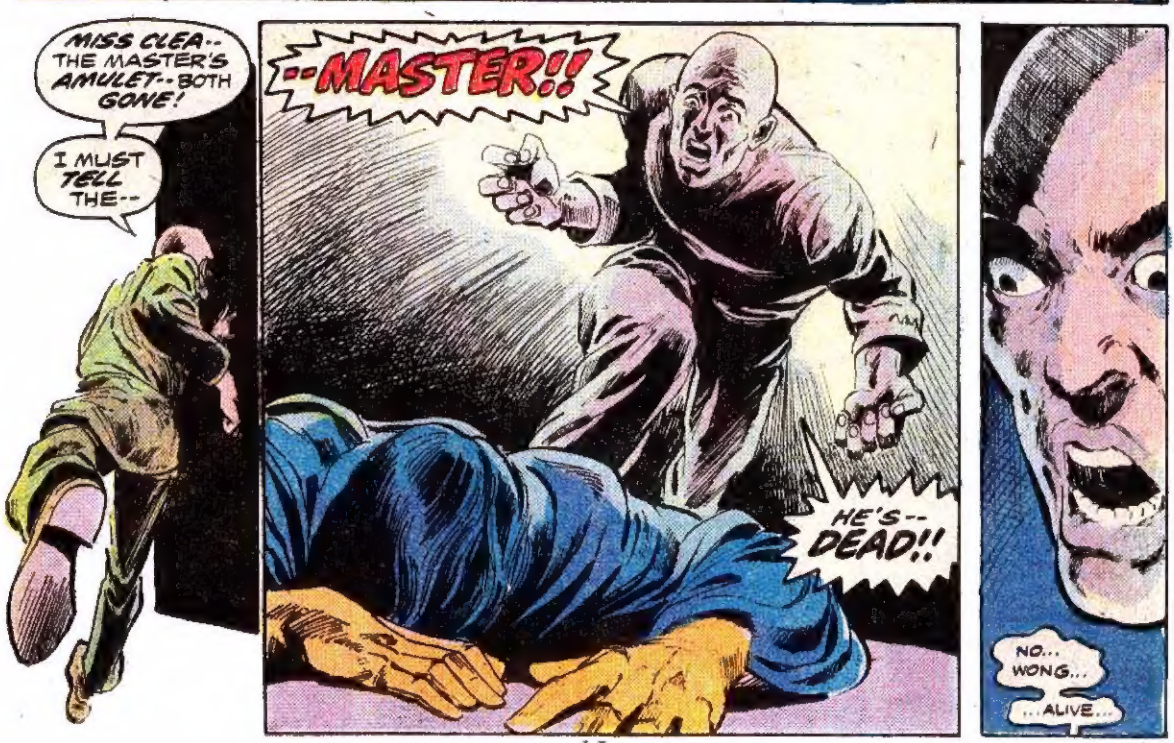
MISS CLEA--HYPNOTIZED BY SOME SINISTER INTRUDER!
I KNOW NOT HOW MY MASTER'S OCCULT DEFENSES WERE BREACHED, BUT THIS FAITHFUL ONE SHALL SERVE IN THEIR STEAD!
AHH... IF IT WERE ONLY SO SIMPLE.
WONG SPENT MUCH OF HIS YOUTH IN THE STUDY OF THE MARTIAL ARTS--
WUMP!
--BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY!
THE GIRL AND THE SERVANT WERE NO PROBLEM.
NOW, ONLY THE MAGICIAN REMAINS!
BUT FIRST-- BEFORE I CLAIM ONE PRIZE--
--I SHALL CLAIM THE OTHER I SEEK:
--THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO!
YET THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH OF UNFAMILIAR FINGERS TO THE AMULET--
--TRIGGERS A BOLT OF MYSTIC ALARM!

THE CURSED BAUBLE SEEKS TO WARN ITS MASTER!
HA! THE BOLT SPLITS, TRYING TO ELUDE ANY COUNTER-CHARM--
--BUT WITHOUT STRANGE'S WILL BEHIND IT, IT'S NO MATCH FOR MY MAGIC!
THE FANGS OF FARALLAH WILL STOP IT!
NOW--ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO FOLLOW THE DOCTOR'S OCCULT TRACK TO ITS END--AND HIS!
ENLARGING A RABBIT IS NO THREAT!
NO, I ENTERED HIS SANCTUM USING INNOCENT MEANS!
HE HAS NO IDEA THAT THE MAN WITH THE SILVER DAGGER HAS COME FOR HIM!
HOW FORTUNATE THAT HIS DEFENSES ONLY REACT TO THREATENING SPELLS!
BREAKING A WINDOW FROM THE INSIDE IS NO THREAT!
AND SO--
--DR. STRANGE SHALL DIE!
BUT PERHAPS THE SILENT STALKER WOULD NOT BE SO CERTAIN--
--IF HE KNEW THAT DR. STRANGE HAS ONE FINAL DEFENSE: A PROTECTIVE AURA AROUND HIS SLEEPING FORM!

AND THEN AGAIN... MAYBE HE WOULD...
...AND IS!
DIE, DEMON! DIE!!
DR. STRANGE CRASHES TO THE FLOOR, HIS HEAD REBOUNDING WITH THE IMPACT!
THEN--
RETURN, BLADE.
HIS AURA COULDN'T STOP US, SLEEK ONE! NOTHING COULD--
--FOR A SILVER DAGGER IS THE TRADITIONAL DESTROYER OF DEMONS--
--AND YOU, WITH YOUR ELDRITCH ENCHANTMENTS KNOWN ONLY TO MYSELF--
--CAN EVEN CLEAVE A DEMON SUPREME!


NOW, GIRL--YOU ARE FREE FROM STRANGE'S UN-CLEAN INFLUENCE--
--AND NOW YOU FALL UNDER MINE!
BUT HAVE NO FEAR! I WILL SHAPE YOU--MOLD YOU--
--SAVE YOUR SOUL--
--AND GIVE YOU LIFE WHERE I GAVE DR STRANGE DEATH!
COME WITH ME, CLEA!
I... COME!

A HUSH ENVELOPS THE MANSION AFTER THAT--A HUSH UNBROKEN EVEN BY THE CITY OUTSIDE--
--BUT A HUSH WITHOUT A SENSE OF PEACE.
AN HOUR PASSES...
:UNNH:... I REMEMBER... INTRUDER...!


MISS CLEA--THE MASTER'S AMULET--BOTH GONE!
I MUST TELL THE--
--MASTER!!
HE'S--DEAD!!
NO... WONG... ...ALIVE...

FOR ONE MIND-STAGGERING MOMENT, WONG HAD TOTTERED ON THE EDGE OF AN ABYSS! HAVING DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO THE LIFE OF ANOTHER, THE DEATH OF DR. STRANGE WOULD HAVE LEFT HIM, LITERALLY, WITH NOTHING.
BUT THOSE THREE WHISPERED WORDS MAKE HIM WHOLE!
MASTER, THIS WOUND IN YOUR BACK--I MUST CLEAN IT.
REMAIN STILL--!
NO... CAN'T!
WAS... ENCHANTED KNIFE... NO DEFENSE! I'M... MORTALLY WOUNDED... OLD FRIEND... DYING!
BRING... EYE OF AGAMOTTO... AND CLEA... QUICKLY! EYE CAN FOCUS... HER STRENGTH AND MINE... TO MAINTAIN... LIFE!
HURRY!
MASTER--THE INTRUDER ALSO STOLE THE AMULET AND MISS CLEA!
THEN...
THEN ORB... OF AGA... MOTTO...
...AND CAPE...
CAN A MAN OUTRUN THE BEATING OF HIS HEART?
I HAVE RETURNED, MASTER! I HAVE THEM!
HERE...
SET THEM... HERE...
DRAPE...
CLOAK...
AROUND...
ME...
REVERENTLY, WONG ALLOWS THE FABLED CLOAK OF LEVITATION TO FALL ACROSS THE MYSTIC MASTER'S SHOULDERS...
...AND THE MYSTIC MASTER FALLS SOFTLY TO HIS FEET.
AGAMOTTO O' CRYSTAL--WHERE BOUND'RIES DECAY--I KNOW THE WILL TO LIVE--GRANT ME THE WAY.

STASIS: THE BLOOD DRAINING FROM DR. STRANGE'S BACK STOPS... BUT THE WOUND AND PAIN LIVE ON.
NOW... ORB...
REVEAL TO ME...
...CLEA!
LIKE HEAT LIGHTNING-- FLICKERING, DIFFUSED-- HER FACE SWIRLS UP OUT OF THE CLOUDY GLASS...
...A FACE OF GLAZED AGONY...
...AND VOICES FOLLOW LIKE DISTANT THUNDER.
CONFESS, GIRL!
RENOUNCE YOUR FAITH IN MAGIC! DENY THIS SICKNESS THAT CLUTCHES YOUR SOUL! JOIN WITH ME!
CLEA!
EH--?
DR. STRANGE!
SILVER DAGGER SPEAKS-- AND EVEN AS HIS LIPS MOVE--
--THE FACE AROUND THEM CHANGES-- MELTS, AND REFORMS--
--INTO A SKULL!
IN ONE HEART-STOPPING INSTANT, DOOM COMES THRUSTING FROM THE GLOBE!
VIPERS OF VALTORR! WHAT IS HAPPENING?

WHAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH HAULS ME INTO THE CRYSTAL?!
I CAN'T RESIST--!
CLOAK OF LEVITATION: RISE!
NO GOOD!
YET I'LL STRUGGLE-- AND WIN! DR. STRANGE SHALL--
WAIT! THE ORB'S POWER-- STEMS FROM NECROMANCY--
--MAGIC THROUGH--
--THE DEAD!

CRYSTAL MAY APPEAR TO BE A CLEAR, STILL POOL OF NOTHINGNESS, THIN AND ETHEREAL -- BUT IT IS GLASS, AND IT IS SOLID.
IMAGINE YOURSELF FALLING, NOT THROUGH SPACE, BUT THROUGH SOLID, INFINITE GLASS.
... INTO THE EYE OF DEATH.

THUMP!

NECROMANCY IS SPIRITUALISM--WHEN THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD ARE UNKNOWN!
THAT WAS DEATH WHICH SEIZED ME! I KNOW!
I FEEL FINE--
--IN FACT, I DO! THE PAIN IS GONE--MY STRENGTH'S RETURNED--!
AM I THEN--DEAD?
GODS!
I'VE BEEN CHANGED--BUT HOW? HEALED--OR "PUT OUT OF MY MISERY"?

I MUST ASSUME, WHATEVER'S HAPPENED, THAT ALL IS NOT LOST--
WHY?
BY THE OMNISCIENCE OF THE ANCIENT ONE! A--
--A CATER-PILLER--?
RIGHT ON, DOC!
AT LEAST YOU COMPRENDO THAT MUCH!

NO, I'M NOT A HALLUCINATION -- OR IS IT AN HALLUCINATION?
IN ANY EVENT, I'M REAL!
AT LEAST, FOR A WORLD WHERE NOTHING IS REAL!
THIS IS DEATH THEN? THE AFTER-LIFE?
LOOKS MORE LIKE THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO TO ME, DOC.
YOU CAN'T GET OUT, YOU KNOW.
I CAN DO WHATEVER I MUST TO SAVE CLEA!
YOU, WORM, ARE WRONG!
GOODBYE!
THAT MAN, MY FOE, IS TORMENTING CLEA. MY SPIRIT STILL EXISTS -- HERE--NOW!
UNTIL MY SPIRIT CEASES TO BE, I WILL TRY TO AREE HER!
AHHHHH...
...BUT OUR CONVERSATION
IS NOT YET
OVER!!

THROUGH THE EYE AND ORB OF AGAMOTTO, UNREALITY HAS BEEN YOUR SERVANT--
-- BUT ANY SORCERY IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD!
WHEN YOU USED THE ORB TO FEND OFF YOUR FAST-APPROACHING REAL DEATH, YOU OPENED YOURSELF TOO COMPLETELY TO UNREALITY--
--AND IT CAPTURED YOU!
YOU ARE NOT DEAD, NO... BUT NEITHER CAN YOU RETURN TO THE LIFE YOU KNEW!
YET I AM ALIVE!
YOU ARE NOTHING!
AS YOU REMAIN HERE, YOU WILL MERGE WITH OUR UNREALITY, CLEA AND SILVER DAGGER WILL NEVER KNOW YOU AGAIN!
NO!!
I AM A SORCERER SUPREME!!

HEAR ME, CREATURE!
I AM NOT TRAPPED! I WILL NOT BECOME UNREAL!
I WILL LIVE!!
DO NOT OVERESTIMATE YOURSELF, STRANGE! DEATH IS THE BEST YOU CAN ACHIEVE HERE!
BUT YOU WON'T PROVIDE IT!
YUMP!
I HATED TO DESTROY THAT BEING, BUT IT COULD NOT BE AVOIDED.
STILL, IF DEATH IS UNREAL HERE, TOO...
AH, BUT DEATH IS REAL... FOR REAL BEINGS.
THAT VOICE--!
YEP-- IT'S ME, ALL RIGHT!
--OR IS IT I?
Y'KNOW, DOC--I LIKE YOUR STYLE.

LISTEN: IF YOU'RE DETERMINED TO TRY TO CHECK OUT, MAN, YOU MIGHT AS WELL HEAD FOR THE CENTER OF THE ORB.
EVERYTHING COMES TOGETHER THERE--MAYBE EVEN AN EGRESS.
THE FURTHEST INSIDE IS THE CLOSEST TO THE OUTSIDE, DIG?
WHY CAN'T I FLY STRAIGHT UP, TO THE PLACE I CAME IN?
'CAUSE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, MAN. NOTHING IS STRAIGHT IN THE ORB!
YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TRUST ME.
I'M A VERY TRUSTWORTHY CATERPILLAR, Y'KNOW.
DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP, THOUGH. EVEN IF YOU DO GET OUT, YOU'LL BE RIGHT BACK WHERE YOU STARTED: MINUTES AWAY FROM DEATH BY STABBING!
BETTER YOU SHOULD JUST LIE OUT! UNREALITY AIN'T TOO BAD.
NO! I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN BECOME SOMETHING I'M NOT!
WHATEVER THE OPPOSITION, DR. STRANGE SHALL BE FREE!!
OKAY, DOC. IT'S YOUR TRIP.
I'LL KEEP MY EYES ON YOU!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
FINIS

NEXT ISSUE: QUEST TO THE CORE OF CHAOS!